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April 27, 2006

Testimony before the House Conservation, Forestry and Outdoor Recreation Committee
Re: SB 971 and 972

Dear Committee members,

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate bills 971 and 972. My name is Kelly Dardzinski, and I am an advocate for the Public Interest Research Group In Michigan. PIRGIM is a nonprofit, non-partisan, statewide organization with that has been working for consumer and environmental protection for over thirty years.

Our 97 state parks help make Michigan a tourist destination, as well as a great place to live. These irreplaceable public treasures can be found in every part of our great state, guaranteeing that a chance for outdoor recreation and natural beauty is within reach of every Michigan citizen. Yet there are growing rumblings that Michigan should be selling our state parks to the highest bidder. Just last week, a Detroit News editorial endorsed former DEQ director Russell Harding's recommendation that our state parks with "no natural or historical value" – a highly questionable concept in and of itself - be "pruned." In this climate, it is essential that our state parkland receive strong legislative protection from these rash sell-off proposals.

We commend Senators Birkholz and Brown for introducing strong bills that recognize that all of our state parkland is a valuable public resource, and that once it is sold, it is lost forever. Unfortunately, since the bills were introduced, they have been substantially weakened. By allowing pieces of parkland up to 100 acres or 15% of a park's total acreage to be sold without legislative approval, these bills in effect send a signal to the Department of Natural Resources that they have a green light to divest themselves of thousands of acres of our irreplaceable parkland with the Legislature's blessing.

When we informed our members that these loopholes had been written into 971 and 972, several hundred immediately responded, urging the Legislature to close these loopholes and enact strong laws to protect our parks. We believe this goal can be met, while still providing the DNR with the flexibility it seeks, by strengthening the bills in two ways:

- Reducing the threshold for legislative approval from 100 acres or 15% of the total acreage to 30 acres, or 5%.
- Clarify that any sale of state park land must be for the purpose of acquiring additional state park land that would better further the DNR's mission to conserve and protect our natural resources for current and future generations to enjoy.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify this morning, and I will be glad to answer any questions.